

socialist standard

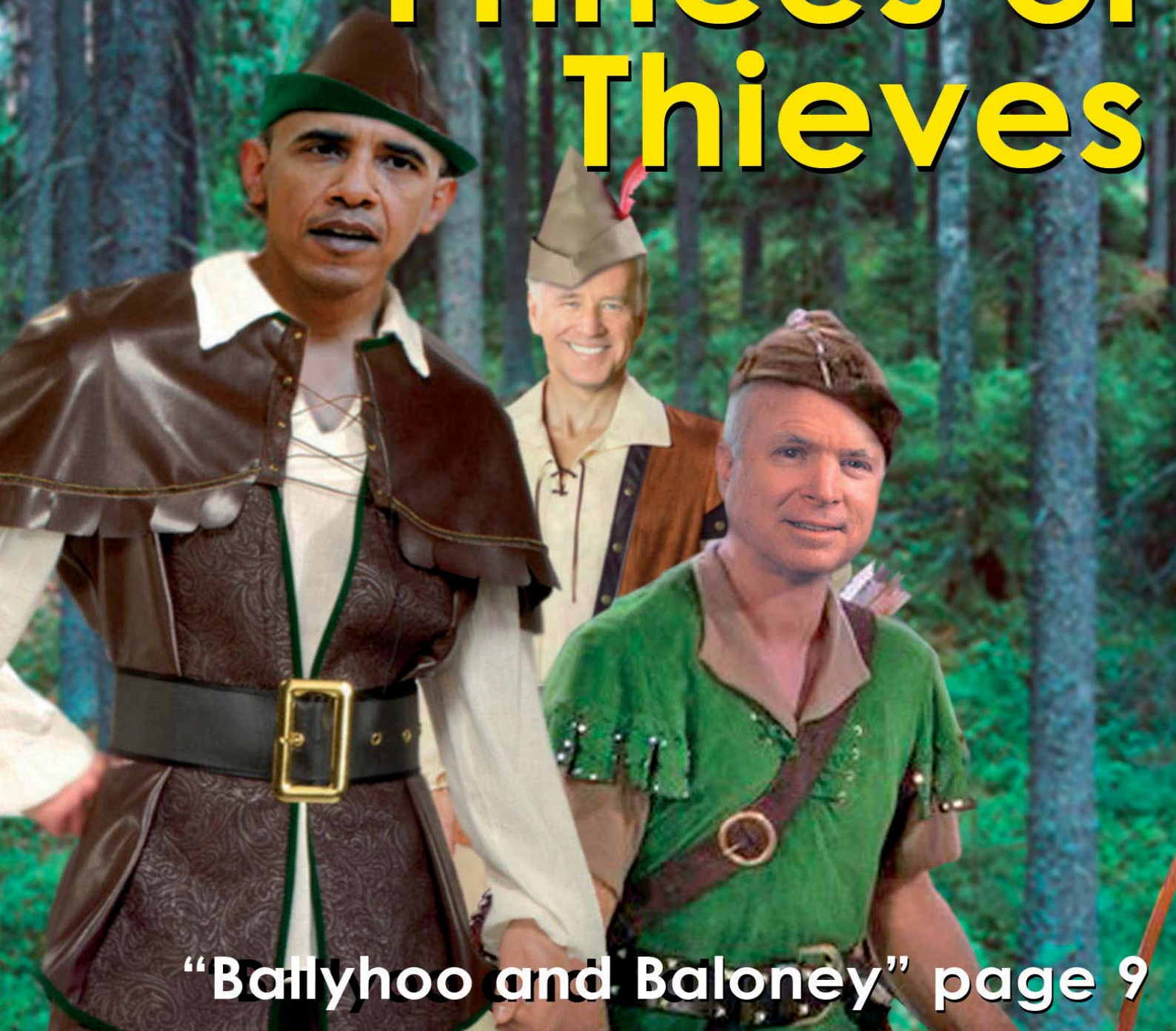


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October 2008
Vol. 104 No.1250
£1.50

Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain - Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement

Princes of Thieves



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THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on **Saturday 4 October** at the address below. Correspondence should be sent to the General Secretary. All articles, letters and notices should be sent to the editorial committee at: The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High street, London SW4 7UN.

tel: 020 7622 3811

e-mail: spgb@worldsocialism.org

Introducing The Socialist Party

The Socialist Party is like no other political party in Britain. It is made up of people who have joined together because we want to get rid of the profit system and establish real socialism. Our aim is to persuade others to become socialist and act for themselves, organising democratically and without leaders, to bring about the kind of society that we are advocating in this journal. We are solely concerned with building a movement of socialists for socialism. We are not a reformist party with a programme of policies to patch up capitalism.

We use every possible opportunity to make new socialists. We publish pamphlets and books, as well as CDs, DVDs and various other informative material. We also give talks and take part in debates; attend rallies, meetings and demos; run educational conferences; host internet discussion forums, make films presenting our ideas, and contest elections when practical. Socialist literature is available in Arabic, Bengali, Dutch, Esperanto, French, German, Italian, Polish, Spanish, Swedish and Turkish as well as English.

The more of you who join the Socialist Party the more we will be able to get our ideas across, the more experiences we will be able to draw on and greater will be the new ideas for building the movement which you will be able to bring us.

The Socialist Party is an organisation of equals. There is no leader and there are no followers. So, if you are going to join we want you to be sure that you agree fully with what we stand for and that we are satisfied that you understand the case for socialism.

Editorial

Who needs finance?

THE DOWNTURN in the global economy appears to be broadening and deepening. The sub-prime slime has become the "Credit Crunch" in 2008, and last month heralded a further round of casualties on what some are starting to call "Manic Monday".

US house repossessions started it all off, followed by mortgage lenders and banks in Europe. But more recently the US government felt unable to allow their Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae (public mortgage lenders) go under, but stopped short of bailing out Lehman Brothers.

The contagious fear of vanishing profits extended beyond mortgages to insurance giant AIG and beyond, and the geographical spread has widened to China and Japan.

Workers could be excused feeling some sort of schadenfreude at the news of a bank running out of money or an insurance company failing to manage risk and hedge their bets. Who can fail to smile as another financial institution is found to have ignored its own advice ("The value of your investment can go down as well as up. You may not get back the amount of money you invested and should only invest sums of money you are prepared to lose").

So there may be fewer stories in the news of £100 burgers in the bistros or £30,000 drinks bills in the restaurants of the City of London, but of course the economic downturn impacts more on the poor than the rich....more

World socialists are opposed to capitalism – boom or bust. Recession just helps throw into sharp relief the logic of the market system. It does however also provide a good opportunity to highlight

some important differences between capitalism, and socialism – where money and wages would not exist and production of wealth would be based on meeting real human needs.

Firstly of course inside socialism there will be no work at all for the whole financial sector that is under such pressure at present. Pensions advisors, insurance salespersons, "independent" financial advisers, mortgage brokers, fund managers: all of these jobs are essential to the smooth operation of capitalism, but are socially-useless and would have no place in a socialist society.

Over 1 million people in the UK – 4 percent of the workforce – are engaged in such activities which are wholly useless. When you factor in related jobs such as accountancy, real estate, and ancillary financial services the numbers mount up. Socialism will really make these positions redundant, but with the pay-off that people will be free to engage in work that is genuinely productive and socially useful.

The market system is an incredibly wasteful mechanism for organising the production of wealth. It prevents people's power over production. Interest rates rise in the US, and a hospital gets mothballed in the UK? The oil price rises and thousands of holidaymakers get stranded in a foreign country? The need for constant minute-by-minute re-evaluations of cashflow projections or return on investment expectations, for every project, every industry, every product results in a colossal waste of the planet's resources and humanity's energy and ingenuity.

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S-C-A-ISM minus O-I-L?

OIL IS the super-fuel. Nothing else does all the things oil does, from heating, fuel, plastics, food, chemicals, pharmaceuticals and clothing. It has the highest energy conversion rate of any fuel and it constitutes 40 percent of global traded energy and 90 percent of transport (*Financial Times*, 4 January, 2004). But aside from its contribution to global warming, it's also running out.

Or so we are told. The recent record hike in the price of oil was mainly speculator-driven and not due to any real shortage of oil. What is running out is *cheap* oil. In fact the world has only used 15 per cent of known reserves, with at least another 20 per cent recoverable by today's technology (*BBC Online*, 21 April, 2004). *Peak oil* production is variously estimated between now and 2050. As supply diminishes and prices rise, more expensive options like the Canadian and Venezuelan tar sands, with capacities rivalling Saudi Arabia, will become profitable to extract. But the rise in costs will be mirrored by a rise in the price of everything dependent on oil, and for the world's poorest billion people, this could be a sentence of death by starvation, with a likely proliferation of food rioting, instability in liberal democracies and an upsurge in the ruling class's faithful stand-by, fascist repression. Meanwhile, as the stakes rise, so do the international tensions. Oil is already determining many countries' domestic and foreign policy, and governments are increasingly jumpy. Oil production plants, and bottleneck sea-lanes, are particularly susceptible to guerrilla attack, and with no in-house reserves Europe or America could be reduced to chaos in weeks (*New Scientist*, 28 June). Worse still, the ruling elites' increasing inability to keep their oil-starved military up to scratch may make wars more likely rather than less, as weakened capability could provoke opportunistic pre-emptive attacks by rivals.

Socialism faces a rather different problem. It is predicated on communal sharing and participation, which in turn rely on the fact of material sufficiency. Should anything threaten this sufficiency, the basis of socialism itself would be threatened. Today, for example, over 50 percent of world rural populations have no access to electricity (*UNDP World Energy Assessment, 2000*). Though not a problem to capitalism, which doesn't care about non-effective, ie non-paying demand (for more on this, see page 19), this will be of the first importance in socialism. Even allowing for waste reduction in the west, that electricity must be found.

There is no single alternative to oil, so a suite of alternatives will have to be employed. Of the non-renewables, gas won't last much longer than oil, and coal, though still plentiful and the chief source of electricity globally, is dirty stuff to burn. Carbon capture technology may mitigate this, but is at an early stage.

The main problem with renewables is that the investment to return rate is unattractive in an oil-addicted economy, therefore they remain under-developed. This is true of geothermal heating systems, but also of wind and tidal systems, ocean thermal electricity, biowaste to oil reconversion plants, and solar thermal and solar photovoltaic technology. Only nuclear fission, with its potential for weapons, has found success, though its waste problem remains intractable, and biofuels, though their impact on food crops and deforestation is well known. Nevertheless, so-called 2G biofuels that use waste

feedstocks of lignin and cellulose are beginning to appear (*New Scientist*, 21 June), while algal fuels are also showing some potential (*New Scientist*, 16 August). Solar panels are now plastic and printable on any surface and may offer up to a 60 percent conversion rate (*New Scientist*, 31 May). Hydrogen, much vaunted in the press as a cheap fuel, is really an energy carrier not an energy source, and relies on coal-fired electricity to produce it. Besides, the problems of storage and distribution are enormous, and there are only a small handful of hydrogen filling stations in the whole of Europe (*EurActive.com*, 4 September)

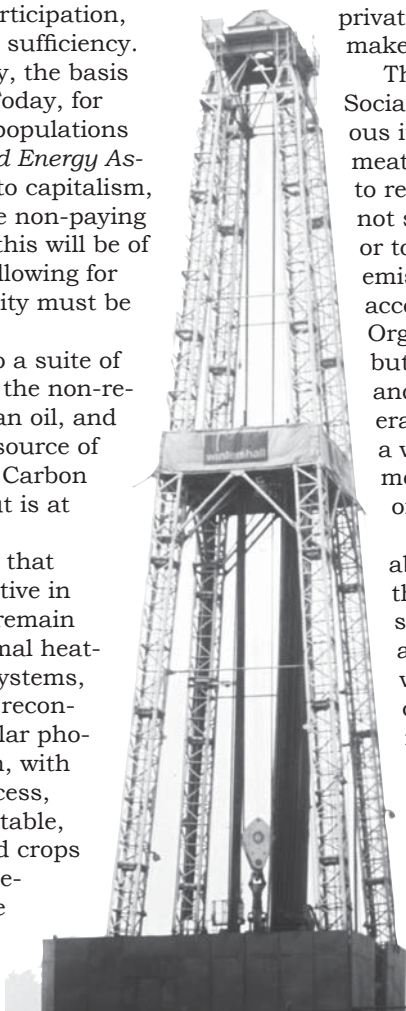
There is some hoopla about the renaissance of the electric car (*New Scientist*, 20 September) with its macho speed and mileage performances, but aside from the £100,000 price tag, there is something about the electric car that somewhat misses the point.

Probably the telling difference between socialism and capitalism would not be how we produce energy but how we use it. Instead of developing electric cars that do 0 – 60 in 4 seconds, socialism would be developing ways of getting cars off the road altogether, because abolishing the prison of paid employment would also abolish the commuter madness on the roads and motorways. Homeworking, or just doing something useful in one's immediate local area, would be a much more practical solution than hi-tech boy-racing.

Similarly, there's no need and no point having, as a norm, private kitchens all cooking the same food at the same time, when socialising the process in the form of volunteer-run restaurants could cut energy hugely and save on waste as well as time. There's no need either for each household to possess identical music or DVD collections, books, clothes, tools or any other item that could be shared via public library systems. The life-span of a domestic power-tool *in use*, from purchase to a 10,000 year career in landfill, is estimated at just 10 minutes (*New Scientist*, 6 January, 2007). Waste is simply energy misused, and capitalism does a lot of that because privatised materialist consumption is how it makes its money.

Then there is what we literally consume. Socialism has to feed everybody and it is obvious it won't be able to do it on a western-style meat diet. Even now we are starting to be told to reduce our reliance on the meat industry not simply because of its clear link to obesity, or to rainforest clearance, or greenhouse gas emissions (18 percent - more than transport, according to the UN Food and Agricultural Organisation – *BBC News Online*, 7 September) but also because of its global impact on water and oil usage. Aside from any ethical considerations, meat may simply be too expensive a way of feeding people when for every kilo of meat protein you need approximately 8 kilos of grain protein (*New Scientist*, 14 June)

If capitalism really uses up the obtainable oil in its customary spendthrift way, then socialism is going to have to employ a suite of solutions, both in means of supply and modes of consumption. Whether this will involve a generation without coffee, or cricket fields under cloches, a communally-managed planet is going to be better placed to deal with these issues than the privately-owned one we have. Socialism will do whatever works, and whatever it takes. Capitalism just does whatever pays, and devil take the consequences. Only one of these systems has a future.



New Pamphlet

An Inconvenient Question. Socialism and the Environment

In recent years the environment has become a major political issue. And rightly so, because a serious environmental crisis really does exist. The air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat have all become contaminated to a greater or lesser extent. Ecology - the branch of biology that studies the relationships of living organisms to their environment - is important, as it is concerned with explaining exactly what has been happening and what is likely to happen if present trends continue.

Since the publication of our *Ecology and Socialism* pamphlet in 1990 environmental problems facing the planet have got much worse. We said then that attempts to solve those problems within capitalism would meet with failure, and that is precisely what has happened. Recent research on increasing environmental degradation has painted an alarming picture of the likely future if the profit system continues to hold sway. Voices claiming that the proper use of market forces will solve the problem can still be heard, but as time goes on the emerging facts of what is happening serve only to contradict those voices.

In this pamphlet we begin with a brief review of the development of Earth and of humankind's progress on it so far. We then examine the mounting evidence that the planet is now under threat of a worsening, dangerous environment for human and other forms of life. The motor of capitalism is profit for the minority capitalist class to add to their capital, or capital accumulation. Environmental concerns, if considered at all, always come a poor second. The waste of human and other resources used in the market system is prodigious, adding to the problems and standing in the way of their solution.

Earth Summits over the last few decades show a consistent record of failure - unjustifiably high hopes and pitifully poor results sum them up. The Green Party and other environmental bodies propose reforms of capitalism that haven't worked or have made very little real difference in the past. Socialists can see no reason why it should be any different in the future. Finally we discuss the need, with respect to the ecology of the planet, for a revolution that is both based on socialist principles of common ownership and production solely for needs, and environmental principles of conserving - not destroying - the wealth and amenities of the planet.

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Introduction
 What is ecology?
 Earth under threat
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 The waste of capitalism
 Earth Summits - a record of failure
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To get a copy by post send a cheque or postal order for £2.50 (made out to "The Socialist Party of Great Britain") to: The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN.

The pamphlet will be launched at a public meeting:
 Saturday 25 October, 6pm

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 Chair: Gwynn Thomas (Socialist Party)
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Globalization versus National Capitalism

In 1648 the first modern diplomatic congress established a new political order in Europe, based for the first time on the principle of “national sovereignty.” This principle drew a sharp dividing line between foreign and domestic affairs. Each “national sovereign” was given free rein within the internationally recognized borders of his state. No outsider had any right to interfere. Recognized borders were inviolable. The “sovereign” was originally simply a prince; later the term was applied to any effective government.

National sovereignty facilitated the undisturbed development of separate national capitalisms – British, French, German, American, and so on. Interstate boundaries were stabilized. Governments were able to take protectionist measures to defend home manufacturers against foreign competition.

Even today the principle of national sovereignty is far from dead. It is enshrined in the United Nations Charter: Chapter VII authorizes the Security Council to impose sanctions or use armed force only in the event of a “threat to the peace, breach of the peace or act of aggression.”

National sovereignty undermined

But in practice national sovereignty has been deeply undermined – first of all, by the emergence of a global economy dominated by huge transnational corporations. International financial institutions such as the World Trade Organization and IMF have largely taken over economic policy making. Indebtedness leaves many states with merely the formal husk of independence.

Some groups of states have “pooled” part of their sovereignty in supranational regional institutions. The prime example is the European Union.

The old interstate system has also been destabilised by the breakup of Yugoslavia and the USSR into 26 new states, four of which lack international recognition. The decision of the West to recognize the independence of Kosovo from Serbia has set a precedent that makes it easier to carve up other states. Of course, the “independence” of Kosovo – occupied by NATO forces, governed by officials from the European Union, its constitution drafted at the US State Department – is purely notional. Russia has now retaliated by

recognizing Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Although this will encourage secessionist movements inside Russia, blocking Georgia’s accession to NATO is evidently a higher priority (see September’s Material World).

Legitimising aggression

National sovereignty is not only undermined in practice, but also contested in theory.

Thus, in recent years the United States and its closest allies have sought to legitimise their military attacks on other states. True, such attacks are nothing new. What is new is open advocacy of the principle of aggression. The main rationales used are the prevention of nuclear proliferation, counter-terrorism and humanitarian intervention (see August’s Material World).

It is instructive to compare the Gulf War of 1991 with the current war against Iraq. The Gulf War, at least ostensibly, was launched in *defence* of the principle of national sovereignty, violated by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. The elder Bush resisted pressure to “finish the job” – occupy Iraq and throw out the Ba’athist regime – out of concern that it would lead to the breakup of Iraq and, in particular, a new Kurdish state that would destabilise the whole region. Such considerations have not deterred his son.

Globalisation of capital, fragmentation of states

Paradoxically, the fragmentation of states is a natural corollary of the globalisation of capital. From the point of view of the transnational corporations, states no longer have important policy-making functions. It is enough if they enforce property rights and maintain basic infrastructure in areas important for business. Small states can do these jobs as well as large ones. In fact, they have definite advantages. They are more easily controlled, less likely to develop the will or capacity to challenge the prerogatives of global capital.

Global versus national capitalism

All the same, there is nothing inevitable about globalisation. It has lost impetus recently, and may even have passed its zenith. One sign is the disarray within the WTO. Another is Russia’s change of direction: in contrast to the Yeltsin administration, which was politically submissive and kept the

country wide open to global capital, the Putin regime reasserted national sovereignty, expelled foreign firms from strategic sectors of the economy, and ensured the dominant position of national (state and private) capital.

Global *versus* national capitalism has emerged as an important divide in world politics. This divide exists, first of all, within the capitalist class of individual countries. Thus, even in the US, the citadel of globalisation, some capitalists – currently excluded from power – are oriented toward the home market and favour national capitalism. And even in Russia some capitalists support globalisation.

Nevertheless, the pattern of political forces differs from country to country, and as a result the global/national divide is reflected in international relations. Here the “globalisers,” led by the US, confront in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (Russia, China and the Central Asian states) an embryonic alliance of national capitals bent on restoring the principle of national sovereignty to its former place in the interstate system.

A different perspective

This context clarifies the difference between our perspective as socialists and the attitude of anti-globalisation activists. Being against capitalist globalisation is not the same as being against capitalism in general. We have ample past experience of a world of competing national capitalisms – quite enough to demonstrate that there is no good reason for preferring such a world to a world under the sway of global capital. The main problem with the movement against globalisation is that it can be mobilized so easily in the interests of national capital, whatever the intentions of its supporters.

To be fair, some anti-globalisation activists are aware of this danger. Acknowledging that humanity faces urgent problems that can only be tackled effectively at the global level, they emphasize that they are not against globalisation as such: they are only against the sort of globalisation that serves the interests of the transnational corporations. This then leads them to explore ideas of globalisation of an “alternative” kind. These ideas at least point in the right direction. Socialism is also an alternative form of globalisation – a globalisation of human community that abolishes capital.

STEFAN



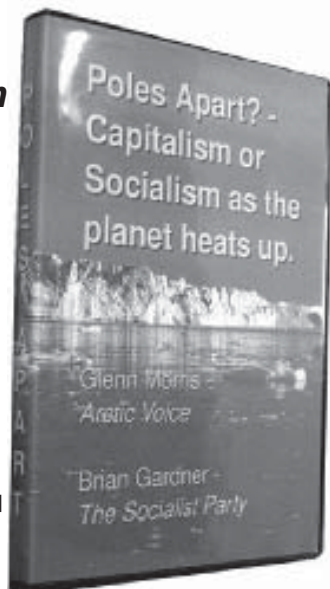
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CAPITALISM IS AWFUL

"There is a lot more poverty in the world than previously thought. The World Bank reported in August that in 2005, there were 1.4 billion people living below the poverty line — that is, living on less than \$1.25 a day. That is more than a quarter of the developing world's population and 430 million more people living in extreme poverty than previously estimated. The World Bank warned that the number is unlikely to drop below one billion before 2015. The poverty estimate soared after a careful study of the prices people in developing countries pay for goods and services revealed that the World Bank had been grossly underestimating the cost of living in the poorest nations for decades. As a result, it was grossly overestimating the ability of people to buy things. And the new research doesn't account for the soaring prices of energy and food in the past two years." (*New York Times*, 2 September)

CAPITALISM KILLS

"People are dying "on a grand scale" around the world because of social injustice brought about by a "toxic" combination of bad policies, politics and economics, the World Health Organisation (WHO) said yesterday. Avoidable health problems caused by social factors — as opposed to biology and genetics — are causing large-scale health inequalities in the UK, the WHO's Commission on the Social Determinants of Health has found after a three-year study. Evidence showed that a boy born in the relatively deprived

Calton area of Glasgow was likely to live on average 28 years fewer than one born a few miles away in Lenzie, a village by the Glasgow-Edinburgh railway. Life expectancy at birth for men in the fashionable north London suburb of Hampstead was found on average to be 11 years longer than for men born in the vicinity of nearby St Pancras station. Adult death rates were generally 2.5 times higher in the most deprived parts of the UK than in the wealthiest areas." (*Independent* 29 August)

PROFITS BEFORE HEALTH

"The drug industry is overpricing vital new medicines to boost its profits, the chair of the health watchdog Nice warns today in an explosive intervention into the debate over NHS rationing. Professor Sir Michael Rawlins spoke out after critics last week accused the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (Nice) of 'barbarism' for refusing to approve expensive new kidney drugs for

NHS use, on the grounds that they were not cost-effective. In an outspoken interview with *The Observer*, he warned of 'perverse incentives' to hike the prices of new drugs - including linking the pay of pharmaceutical company executives to their firm's share price, which in turn relied on keeping profits healthy. Traditionally some companies charged what they thought they could get away with," (*Observer*, 17 August)

MODERN TIMES

"Over the past five years alone, the average earnings of chief executives of FTSE-100 companies have doubled to £3.2m. Their pay has been rising five times faster than their employees'. The top 1 per cent of the population now enjoy 23 per cent of national wealth, while the poorest half share a mere 6

per cent. For most of the 20th century, Britain became steadily more equal. For the past three decades the movement has been in the opposite direction and it is estimated that Britain's wealthiest person, Lakshmi Mittal, is worth more than twice as much as anybody in the past 150 years." (*New Statesman*, 11 September)

Contact Details

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Central London branch. 2nd Weds. 6.30pm. 2nd Wednesday 6.30pm. The Printworks, 113/117 Farringdon Road, London. EC1 (Nearest Underground/Thameslink: Farringdon 0.2 miles).

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Glasgow branch. 3rd Wednesday of each month at 8pm in Community Central Halls, 304 Maryhill Road, Glasgow. Richard Donnelly, 112 Napiershall Street, Glasgow G20 6HT. Tel: 0141 5794109. E-mail: richard.donnelly1@ntlworld.com

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West Lothian. 2nd and 4th Weds in month, 7.30-9.30. Lanthorn Community Centre, Kennilworth Rise, Dedridge, Livingston. Corres: Matt Culbert, 53 Falcon Brae, Ladywell, Livingston, West Lothian, EH5 6UW. Tel: 01506 462359 E-mail: matt@wsmweb.fsnet.co.uk

WALES

Swansea branch. 2nd Mon, 7.30pm, Unitarian Church, High Street. Corres: Geoffrey Williams, 19 Baptist Well Street, Waun Wen, Swansea SA1 6FB. Tel: 01792 643624

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OVERSEAS

World Socialist Party of Australia.

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Socialist Party of Canada/Parti

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World Socialist Party (New Zealand)

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World Socialist Party of the United

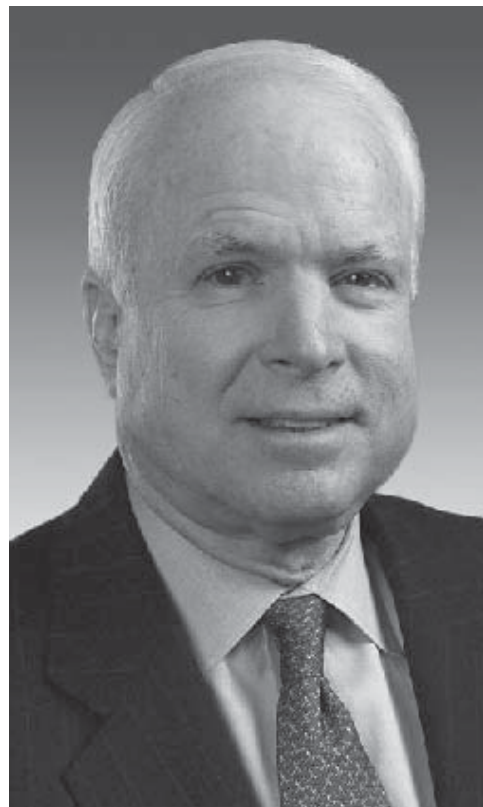
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Ballyhoo and baloney

The National Conventions of the Democratic and Republican Parties have become forums for putting the finishing touches on the “cult of personality” of the candidates, culminating with the vacuous speeches of the candidates themselves.



From left: Barack Obama, Joe Biden and John McCain.



A demagogue, H.L. Mencken once said, is someone “who will preach doctrines he knows to be untrue to men he knows to be idiots.” This is a pretty good description of the US presidential candidates in action at their late-summer conventions. Although, to be fair to those who listened to the convention speeches, it was more a case of preaching idiotic ideas to people who *wished* those ideas were true.

The contrast between the gassy rhetoric of the politicians and the weighty problems facing workers was particularly striking at this year’s conventions, highlighted further by the juxtaposition between jubilant delegates inside the convention hall and the pepper-sprayed protestors outside.

The candidates from both parties employed the same basic template for demagoguery in writing their convention speeches. We encounter the same sorts of rhetorical techniques and the logic of “public relations” shapes every line. The candidates

are less interested in conveying ideas than manipulating them to fashion images to sell the product – in this case, the candidates themselves.

Family lies

The first chapter of *Convention Speeches for Dummies*, if such a book were ever to be written, would probably be entitled: “Making the Most of the Family.” Each candidate, without exception, began with extravagant praise for the family – the candidate’s own family, that is. The candidates informed the American people that they too have spouses who are loving and loyal, children and grandchildren they are proud of, and hardworking parents as wise as they are kind. (Perhaps this convinced the sceptics who thought that the candidates had been hatched in a secret laboratory in North Dakota.)

Behind my plastic exterior, each candidate seemed to be saying, is a real live human being, just like you. Just like us, but even *better*. Thanks to the “quintessentially American”

values of hard work, perseverance and personal integrity that the candidates acquired as children from their saintly mothers.

In his speech, Joe Biden described his 90-year-old mother as a person “defined by her sense of honour” who “believes bravery lives in every heart” and that “it will be summoned.” She taught little Joey the “dignity of work” and that “anyone can make it if they try” and emphasized that it is important to “live our faith and treasure our family.” Biden said that his “mother’s creed is the American creed: No one is better than you; you are everyone’s equal; and everyone is equal to you.” (And US Senators are more equal than most.)

McCain mentioned his mother too, saying: “I wouldn’t be here tonight but for the strength of her character.” Thankfully he was not as long-winded as Biden – perhaps to secure adequate time for another thrilling episode of “John McCain: War Hero” – but he did mention that his mother taught him some patriotic

claptrap about how “we’re all meant to use our opportunities to make ourselves useful to our country.”

Obama praised his mother “who raised my sister and me on her own while she worked and earned her degree; who once turned to food stamps but was still able to send us to the best schools in the country with the help of student loans and scholarships.” For good measure, Obama threw in his grandmother too, “who worked her way up from the secretarial pool to middle-management” and taught him “about hard work.”

The mother featured in Palin’s speech was Palin herself, who “was just your average hockey mom” whose political career began when she “signed up for the PTA” because she “wanted to make my kids’ public education better.” Palin had a small-town upbringing that encouraged “honesty, sincerity and dignity” and she thanked her parents for teaching her that, “this is America, and every woman can walk through every door of opportunity.”

It wasn’t just the parents who were mobilized for the cause: children and grandchildren served as useful props too. Palin’s 4-month old son, who suffers from Down Syndrome, was brought to the raucous event and passed around on stage for the photo op. Obama made use of his two daughters, who told daddy how much they love him. And Biden said that when he looked at his grandchildren, and at Obama’s daughters, he realized: “I’m here for their future.” Many watching this strange spectacle must hope that the candidates’ love for those little ones will be enough to keep their powerful fingers away from “the button.”

But, lest we feel too safe, in the next breath these politicians are talking about their sons who are headed off to war, such as Beau Biden or Jimmy McCain. Palin also got some good mileage out of her son Track, who not only is headed to Iraq but will conveniently ship out on September 11 “in the service of his country” (by securing the Starbucks in the Green Zone).

It is rather sickening to see how willing the candidates are to squeeze out whatever political advantage can be had from their children. Even the pregnancy of Palin’s teenage daughter –and shotgun wedding – is good election fodder, appealing to those families who have experienced that common side-effect of “abstinence education.”

We feel your pain

Once the family motif had been

fully exploited, right down to the last grandchild, the candidates shared some snapshots of “less fortunate” families and individuals in the US. Luckily for them, there are literally millions of hard-luck stories to choose from!

Obama, for instance, spoke of “a woman in Ohio, on the brink of retirement [who] finds herself one illness away from disaster after a lifetime of hard work” and “a man in Indiana has to pack up the equipment he’s worked on for twenty years and watch it shipped off to China, and then chokes up as he explains how he felt like a failure when he went home to tell his family the news.”

Notice how careful Obama was to choose examples from crucial “swing states” (and also throw in China as a convenient scapegoat). One can easily imagine political advisors sifting through such evidence of capitalist misery to get to the political gold, weighing each situation carefully.

Biden said in his speech that he looks out at people’s homes during his evening train ride home from work and “can almost hear what they’re talking about at the kitchen table after they put the kids to bed,” imagining the following sorts of conversations:

“Winter’s coming. How we gonna pay the heating bills? Another year and no raise? Did you hear the company may be cutting our health care? Now, we owe more on the house than it’s worth. How are we going to send the kids to college? How are we gonna be able to retire?”

Biden’s little story (punctuated with his “gonna’s”) is meant to highlight his compassion and solidarity for working folk – and he is so proud that he rides a train that he had Obama mention it too! – but the image of a powerful US Senator breezing through town, as he daydreams about stick-figure citizens in between sips of coffee, only underscores the distance separating him from those kitchen-table conversations.

McCain tried his hand at this compassion stuff too, recognizing that “these are tough times for many of you.” Unfortunately there was no train window separating him from a heckler (and Iraq War veteran) who proceeded to berate the candidate for his poor record on veteran’s rights. After the ungrateful citizen had been dragged out of the hall, and the chants of “U.S.A! U.S.A.!” to drown out his heckling had subsided, McCain continued reading from his teleprompter: “You’re worried about keeping your job or finding a new one,” the monotone voice intoned,

“and you’re struggling to put food on the table and stay in your home.” And later, McCain threw in a few swing-state stories of his own, such as “Bill and Sue Nebe from Farmington Hills, Michigan, who lost their real estate investments in the bad housing market” so that now Bill has a temporary job and “Sue works three jobs to help pay the bills.”

In recounting these stories, the candidates showed no hint that their own political parties bear any responsibility, nor did they recognize any connection between such problems and our current social system. The whole point was just to show off their own compassion, which Bush Sr. tried to do on campaign trail back in 1992 when he succinctly said, “Message: I care.”

Policy promises

Only around the middle of their speeches did the candidates finally begin to sketch some of the policies they plan to implement if elected. But these promises are so vague as to almost defy analysis.

For the few ideas that they did discuss in any detail – regarding taxation, education and foreign policy – the similarities between the candidates far outweighed the differences. Both McCain and Obama pledged to lower taxes for the “middle class,” improve education, and somehow win the war in Afghanistan (while keeping Iran and Russian in their place).

Obama kicked off his list of policy solutions with the vow to reform the tax code so as to “cut taxes for 95 percent of all working families.” Even setting aside the question of whether sweeping tax cuts will be possible, while waging two wars in the midst of deep recession, it is telling that Obama and the Democrats focused so much of their attention on the issue of taxation, which is not a working-class issue to begin with (as taxes ultimately come out of the surplus-value created in production). Moreover, Obama is quietly stepping back from an earlier promise to rescind Bush’s tax cuts for the wealthy in recent months.

After listing many of the grave problems facing the country earlier in his speech – and harping on the need for “change” throughout his campaign – ultimately the best that Obama can come up with is to steal a page from the Republican playbook and call for tax cuts as an economic cure-all. This is change that John McCain can believe in, who also promised to cut taxes in his speech.

And the two candidates are on

the same page for other issues as well. Both call for something called “energy independence” and made the usual pledge to root out corruption and eliminate corporate loopholes as a means of securing the necessary government funds.

Both also promised to improve education, although there was a difference between Obama’s promise to “recruit an army of new teachers and pay them higher salaries” and McCain’s vow to “shake up failed school bureaucracies with competition [and] empower parents with choice.” Still, Obama is reluctant to veer off too sharply from the current administration and in his speech he threw in a line about calling for “higher standards and more accountability,” which indicated his agreement with aspects of Bush’s “No Child Left Behind” policy.

Perhaps the biggest policy difference concerned health care. McCain ignored the issue, except to say that he opposes “government-run health care system where a bureaucrat stands between you and your doctor,” while Obama emphasized the need for improvements. Yet Obama only calls for an expansion of access to medical insurance, not a reform that

would drive out the private insurance companies.

The candidates seemed a little bored by such domestic issues, but warmed up when it came to demonstrating that they are reckless and bloodthirsty enough to be “Commander-in-Chief.” Both promised, repeatedly, to keep America and its people safe. Neither expressed any hesitation in sending troops to war and pledged to strengthen the armed forces. Both vowed to continue the fight against Al-Qaeda and issued threats to Iran and Russia. It seems that Obama’s days as the “anti-war candidate” are long gone.

This discussion of policy, which should have made the distinction between the two candidates clear, only underscored their similarities, while again revealing the enormous gap between the severity of the problems faced – whether economic, diplomatic or environmental – and the meagre “solutions” that both parties are offering.

Orchestrated response

No sooner had the candidate uttered the obligatory “God bless America” to end the convention speech than TV commentators were

breathlessly informing viewers that it was a “homerun” that electrified the crowd and will energize the base of the party. It was as if the pundits were frightened that, if given a split-second for reflection, viewers might reach the alternative conclusion that the speech was rather pointless and insipid.

Both parties made every effort to generate the most favourable reaction to their candidate’s speech. Even before it was delivered, there were newspaper articles revealing what the speech would discuss, with titles like: “Obama to Get Specific” or “McCain to Strike a Bipartisan Note.” At first glance this custom of disclosing the content of the speech in advance seems rather bizarre, as it makes the speeches even less interesting to watch, but it gives the TV commentators an idea of how they should frame the discussion.

The entire process surrounding the convention speeches is hermetically sealed from the public and from reality itself. If the candidates manage to “hit one out of the park,” as the cliché goes, it is only because US politics is a game played on a narrow field of little-league proportions.

MICHAEL SCHAUERTE



Cooking the Books 1

Cuba’s wage system

Earlier this year, when in June the Cuban government, now under Fidel Castro’s brother Raul, announced a new system of wage payments, the *Guardian* (13 June) wrote that Cuba had “abandoned its egalitarian wages system”. This brought a response (20 June) from Helen Yaffe, author of *Ermesto Che Guevara: The Economics of Revolution*:

“In reality, there has never been an ‘egalitarian wage system’ (i.e. one where every worker was paid the same): Che Guevara himself devised a new salary scale, introduced in 1964, with 24 different basic wage levels, plus a 15% bonus for over-completion”.

In other words, Cuba never had practised wage equality, not even when Guevara was Minister of Industry. Not that socialists favour equal wages. As long as the wages system – the sale of people’s working skills for money – exists there will be a different price for the different types of skill. We want the abolition of the whole wage system, an end to the buying and selling of people’s working abilities, and the application of the principle “from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs”.

Yaffe made a claim about this too:

“Like Marx himself, Che recognised the socialist principle: ‘From each according to his ability, to each according to his work’ – which your article associates exclusively with Raul. Cuba has never claimed to be communist and therefore never embraced the principle ‘from each according to his ability, to each according to his need’, which expresses the attainment of communist society”.

While it is true that Marx thought that it would not have been

possible to implement “to each according to needs” immediately had a “co-operative society based on the common ownership of the means of production” been established in his day, he never drew a distinction between a socialist society (where this principle couldn’t yet be applied) and a communist society (where it would be). He actually spoke of two “phases” of the *same* society, which he called “communist society”. Engels and the later socialist movement adopted the term “socialist society”, but both terms referred to the same type of society; they are interchangeable.

In any event, the temporary measure until distribution according to needs became possible which Marx mentioned in the private notes he wrote in 1875 known as *The Critique of the Gotha Programme* was a system of “labour-time vouchers”. This would probably have proved unworkable but it was not the same as “to each according to their work”. It would have been “to each according to their working *time*”, with people being given a consumption voucher based on the time spent at work not for the particular kind of work they did. There wouldn’t be 24 different levels, just one. An engineer and a cleaner who put in the same number of hours would get the same number of consumption vouchers. In this sense it would have been “egalitarian”.

But what Lenin, Stalin, Castro and Guevara called “socialism” did not even correspond to Marx’s “first phase of communist society” since it was based on the state, not the common, ownership and control of the means of production, the majority remaining propertyless and having to sell their working skills to live. As the state was controlled by the leaders of a minority vanguard party, these leaders became in effect the employers of the excluded majority. As employers they had to devise some system of pricing the different kinds and qualities of labour-power they purchased. Hence schemes such as Guevara’s and the one just introduced in Cuba. This was state capitalism, not socialism/communism.

What food crisis?

Those suffering most from the “current world food crisis” may not know why they are but they probably do know that they can have very little impact on the outcome as the world is structured currently.

Corporate control

In 1921 36 companies were responsible for 85 percent of US grain exports. By the end of the 70s six companies controlled 90+ percent of Canadian, European, Australian and Argentinian grain and currently Cargill and Continental each control 25 percent of the world's grain trade. While 37 nations have been plunged into food crisis Monsanto has had record sales from herbicides and seeds and Cargill's profit increased by 86 percent. On the one hand these corporations use, wherever there is a perceived advantage, the poorer countries for cash crops, manufacturing using cheap labour, cheaper processing and they take advantage of huge subsidies for which they lobby constantly, and on the other show indifference to the employees and labourers in these countries. Wages are kept as low as can be managed and conditions of employment are almost non-existent. Long working hours, enforced, often unpaid, overtime, no sick-pay non-existent or poor compensation for accidents and no pension.

Of the world's people as a whole, 70 percent earn their livelihood by producing food, their own included. From these a growing number are now producing crops for fodder or alternative fuels, reducing the amount of land available for human food production and thereby increasing its cost. Profit is the bottom line.

Monsanto is huge in soy bean production having a virtual monopoly with their 'Roundup Ready' seeds. Genetically modified seeds grown to be used for cattle feed, fish feed, all manner of industrial uses plus 80 percent of processed foods contain soy bean. Why would you promote an oil-seed that has a relatively low oil yield – 18 percent, compared with coconut (75 percent), groundnut (55 percent) and sesame (50 percent), if it wasn't simply linked to your ownership of the means of their production? The health risks associated with soy bean consumption are becoming clearer, especially an oestrogen problem. One test revealed that soy-based infant formula yields a dose of oestrogen equivalent to

8-12 contraceptive pills daily.

Monsanto (originators of Agent Orange) acquired Unilever's European wheat-breeding business in 1998. They have a large stake in India's largest seed company and have also bought Cargill's international seed operations in Central and Latin America, Europe, Asia and Africa thus virtually monopolising production, limiting choice and pushing genetically engineered wheat. Their intellectual property scams, internationally infamous, banning the saving and trading of seed (something done for thousands of years with no problems of ownership attached) have been followed by many court cases usually to the detriment of small farmers in both poor and 'developed' world. The infamous 'terminator' gene which makes plants' seeds infertile has perhaps been the most cynical invention, forcing farmers into buying seed every year, putting them in hock to the big corporations and resulting in penury.

Around the world farmers have been pressured by large companies to grow cash crops. Cotton started to displace food crops in India after trade liberalisation was introduced in 1991. Aggressive advertising campaigns were conducted by Monsanto, for one, to introduce hybrid cotton seed which, being more vulnerable to pest attack, required the use of more pesticide than the varieties traditionally grown. Having borrowed on credit for both seed and pesticide and finding themselves in unresolvable debt following crop failures, according to Vandana Shiva in *Stolen Harvest*, many hundreds of farmers committed suicide by ingesting the very pesticides that were supposed to have protected their crops. Suicide deaths of Indian farmers continue to be a huge problem.

Ecologically unsound

There are ecological issues surrounding the current world food system. Here there are many links between this and the previous section. In their pursuit of profit worldwide mega-corporations have been responsible for some of the worst degradation of land, water, air and sea. Particularly relevant to food production, however, it is being recognised in more quarters that industrial farming damages the environment (as well as concentrating profits in fewer hands) and that small farms are actually more productive and much less damaging. Only this year a UN commission of 400 agricultural experts concluded that the world needs to shift from current agribusiness methods to a more ecological and small-scale approach. It comes as no surprise to learn that neither the US government nor agribusiness agreed to endorse the recommendations. A US dairy farmer allied to Via Campesina which is a global movement of peasant and farm organisations said words to the effect that at last it's recognised that industrial GM crops and globalisation methods have led to more hungry people but why hadn't they listened to farmers instead of corporations in the first place? Good question, to which we know the answer.

The (mainly GM) soy bean comes in for another attack here. To produce its oil requires solvents – bad for the environment; producing it creates saturated fats – bad for health. To ensure that maximum benefit (i.e. maximum profit, not maximum nutrition) is derived from the humble soy bean a US company is now also producing look-alike pulses, lentils etc from some of this bulk. Mono-crops and intensive farming by their very nature create havoc with the land, with the soil, requiring an input of fertilizer to fulfil the role that mixed farming does automatically. The soil gradually becomes impoverished leading to the

necessity for more fertilizer, itself a problem from leaching into and contaminating water. Fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides all alter the nature of the soil, the ecological balance, ultimately denuding the area of the very plants, microbes, insects, worms, birds, small animals etc that determine its replenishment in a natural cycle. Traditional farming is shown to be far superior both for the health of the soil and also for crop yield. Animals manure the land, worms and other creatures turn and aerate it, insects assist pollination, other insects, birds and small animals dispose of many of the pests naturally whilst also replenishing the soil with nutrients and crops of different types in rotation take nutrients from and return nutrients to the soil. In many parts of the world the 'weeds' that grow among crops are crops themselves, not to be sprayed and killed but to be picked and eaten by humans and animals or else to be ploughed back into the ground returning natural organic matter.

One obvious negative effect of growing mono-crops for export or as non-food products such as biofuels is that it impacts on the amount of land available for growing food for local consumption, pushing small farmers off the land altogether or to patches of less productive land. Aggressive growth in agricultural exports has been linked to increasing poverty and hunger in the exporting country. Examples include the Philippines where the acreage for growing cut flowers was massively increased with a corresponding decline in acreage for food staples resulting in the destruction of approximately 350,000 livelihoods and increasing rice imports by a factor of ten; Brazil, when soy bean exports increased dramatically (1970s) as animal feed for Japan and Europe, hunger increased from one third to two thirds of the population. By the 90s Brazil became the third largest exporter of soy bean having increased acreage by 37 percent over 15 years displacing millions of small farmers and decreasing rice production by 18 percent further exacerbating hunger and poverty. On this topic Vandana Shiva gets right to the point, "The food security of the US and other wealthy food-importing countries depends largely on the destruction of other people's security" (in *Alternative Globalization*, ed. By John Cavanagh and Jerry Mander),

Other ecologically unsound farming practices such as raising animals intensively leads to massive problems for the animals, for the humans raising them and eating them and for the environment in which they are kept. For instance, as fish farms have become more extensive in acreage and more intensive in production bacterial infections have spread to fish in the wild. Whereas it used to be recommended to eat fish regularly as part of a healthy diet there are now warnings to limit drastically intake of farmed fish. Shrimp farming is known as a 'rape and run' industry because of its unsustainability and the inevitability that after a handful of years the site will be ecologically devastated and susceptible to massive outbreaks of disease, leaving hectares of former good fishing coastline unfit and unable to supply locals with a catch of any kind – coastal wastelands.

Shrimp farms and fish farms require more wet fish, processed into meal, pro rata than they ultimately produce, consuming more resources than they produce. The fish caught by trawling and purse-seining for the production of meal deprives people of both food and livelihood, depletes fish stocks drastically, kills all kinds of aquatic life – and this to provide shrimp for people living a long way from the devastation and knowing little about it. Mangroves, crucial in many coastal areas for protection against storms, preventing erosion and recognised as important habitat for much marine life have been devastated around the world in order that some of us may eat shrimp. Sri Lanka lost nearly half their mangrove area in 10 years; Vietnam lost more than 100,000 hectares in 4 years; most of Ecuador's shrimp comes from former mangrove swamps; a third of Thailand's lost mangroves was as a result

of shrimp farming over 30 years up to 1993. Ecological and environmental man-made disasters. Intensive shrimp farming also leads to permanent salinisation of groundwater and has created water famine in formerly water abundant areas in India, causing death of cattle and gradual contamination of former productive rice paddies. Because of intensive shrimp production in Bangladesh rice production fell from 40,000 to only 36 (*not* 36 thousand) metric tonnes between 1976-86 with similar losses reported in Thailand. Shrimp and prawn have been 'farmed' traditionally in India for hundreds of years without this serious adverse effect on the ecology. The traditional methods have proved effective and have produced good income for farmers combining paddy growing in the monsoon season with shrimp 'farming' in other seasons when the fields are filled temporarily with saline water. Whether aquaculture or agriculture, natural methods prove to be more economical in terms of input, more productive in terms of output showing biodiversity and labour intensification to be both more efficient and sustainable.

The deregulated global market

There is a raft of trading practices stacked against the poorer 'developing' countries, which incorporate the majority of the world's population, in favour of corporations in the 'developed' countries. The international monetary organisations, World Bank, World Trade Organisation, International Monetary Fund all function to ensure maximum returns flow into the coffers of trans-national corporations including agribusinesses. All loans have to be paid back with interest. Aid is tied to agreements, purchases and long-term commitment to remittances back to the donor country. Subsidies to agriculture flow freely in the 'developed' world, especially to agribusiness; in the poor world subsidies are called a barrier to free trade and have to be removed. Markets must be open – to subsidised products from the rich. Traditional local production systems have been consistently undermined to favour global corporations causing increased landlessness in the process. Many of these landless, former farmers now work for poverty wages in factories sub-contracted to big-name sportswear labels, unable to grow *any* food of their own now, just part of the growing number of consumers struggling to *buy* enough food to put on the table.

Vandana Shiva commented aptly on the root causes of hunger and poverty in 2007 thus, "A combination of loss of land and loss of control of local resources like water, seeds and bio-diversity. All of these are basic to farming communities but are now in the hands of global corporations." IMF loans to poor countries are channelled into export subsidies for US agribusinesses thus further assisting multinationals to dominate smaller, local businesses whether domestic or foreign.

The main goal of the WTO and its allies has been to remove all and any obstructions which may hamper corporations. National laws, standards and environmental protection rules have been subsumed by the WTO's rulings resulting in laxer rules across the board, reduced labour, environmental, food and health regulations. In effect deregulation has led to decreased local control, a worsening general environment, an increase in poverty and hunger whilst concentrating power, wealth and influence among the global corporations.

Biofuels

Biofuels were originally heralded as the wonder fuel, something to challenge fossil fuels and a way to save the world from its dependence on oil, a greener product, sustainable and easily grown around the world. David Moberg, in an August 2008 article "Let them eat free markets" in *The Times*, writes, "once seen as a way of using up European and US surpluses

biofuels are now threatening to become a global, corporate-controlled, industrial farming and export business that could put US SUVs in competition with food for poor people in other countries whilst degrading tropical forests." So, here again is monoculture on a grand scale, degradation of the environment, cash crops taking the place of food crops and small farmers forced off the land to increase production and profit. A further downside to biofuels and a good reason to take another look at the topic for those who still believe it to be a 'green' fuel is that it actually takes something like 18 percent more energy to process the fuel than will be available in the finished product. Not best use of agricultural land, resources or manpower.

Buying Power

Simple buying power – or rather lack of it – is a fifth factor.. If you're not growing your own food it has to be bought. One way or another customers have to pay. When half or more of your income is already spent on food, as it is for the majority world, then rising prices of basics like rice and wheat are an immediate threat. The priority becomes *what* can I eat? Not what can I cut out in order that I might eat, just what is there I can afford to eat? In 2007 the price of rice on the world market rose 16 percent. Between January and April of 2008 it rose a further 141 percent. Rice is the staple diet of Haitians, Haiti, being one of the poorest nations on the planet, is also one of the countries that was devastated from the loss of domestic farm incomes when highly subsidised US rice was dumped on them following WTO instructions. There is a photograph showing a Haitian woman sitting on the ground mixing and spreading out row upon row of biscuits to dry in the sun. Biscuits made of clay, salt and vegetable fat. Let them eat cake!

Similar stories from around the world reveal how previously solvent farmers have been reduced to penury. Mexicans cannot compete with US maize and cotton. Jamaican dairy farmers can't compete with EU subsidised milk powder. Mali, Benin, Burkino Faso etc. have lost double from the fall in cotton prices than they receive in US foreign aid. All of these and similar unfair practices drastically reduce the buying power of millions of people. According to the environmental pressure group, the International Forum on Globalisation, "The ultimate sustainable agricultural solution is transition to non-corporate, small-scale organic farming as practised for millennia."

Cause and Effect

What we have seen here are the

effects of a system that is structured for the benefit of a few corporations at the expense of the many. Inevitably the food crisis will continue to grow for an ever-increasing number of the world's population unless and until the *causes* of the crisis are eliminated. Politicians of diverse leanings, human rights advocacy groups and pundits of various persuasions offer a medley of fixes. Level the playing field. Fair trade, not free trade. Restore national sovereignty to international trade. Limit the power of global corporations. Strengthen human rights laws to prevent eviction of people from their land. Allow landless peasants access to and ownership of privately owned, unused land. Make the international institutions more accountable to citizens not to capital. Increase regulation of outsourcing. Force companies despoiling the environment to clean up the mess and pay compensation. Implement tougher environmental standards at all levels.

The problem common to these and other 'solutions' is that none of them are comprehensive, none are for all time and none are for all people. There is already a UN charter for human rights which, in theory, covers all possible scenarios, which is ostensibly for the protection of the well-being of all but which, in practice, cannot work because it is not controlled by the democratic will of the people but by a few strong countries pursuing the economic policies of their elites.

The principles underlying socialism, whilst not offering an immediate panacea, do address all the issues of the rights of all individuals, "by the conversion into the common property of society the means of production and distribution and their democratic control by the whole people." Unlike the UN and numerous international agreements, multi-lateral accords and protocols which are repeatedly undermined by one or more powerful states consistently overruling decisions and agreements the ethic of socialism is rooted in the people. As more and more of the common wealth is taken from the people more and more people experience the food crisis first hand. Cause and effect. Removing money, the incentive and purpose of accumulation (the *raison d'être* of capitalism) and transforming world society into one of free access and common ownership – the world belonging to all and to none – will be to eliminate the causes of hunger and to effect an end to further speculation about a world food crisis.

JANET SURMAN

Marxism and needs

Does Marxism need to be reinterpreted in the light of the ecological problem faced by humanity?

Is the "world of abundance" traditionally advocated by socialists feasible? Not according to Claude Bitot, known as the author of a book on the future of the movement for communism (see *Socialist Standard*, December 1995), in his recent book *Quel autre monde possible?* ("What other world is possible?"). Echoing the ideas of some Greens but denying any affinity with them as "bobos" (trendies), Bitot argues that the only viable form of communism (or socialism) today is the austere pre-industrial communism advocated by Babeuf and his followers during the French Revolution and first part of the 19th century.

His criticism of Marx – that he accepted the development of capitalism as a necessary step towards socialism – can be traced back to the influence of a "productivist" or technological determinist reading of Marx, based on *The Poverty of Philosophy* and the *Communist Manifesto*, which the great man was considerably qualifying by the time he got round to writing the *Grundrisse*. According to this simplified version of Marxism – faithfully trotted out by Bitot – it is the development of the forces of production that drives history. Capitalism in the form of merchant capital develops in the pores of feudalism, notably in the towns. Over time the forces of production develop to the point where feudal relations become fetters on the possibilities of further development. Feudalism therefore disappears with the rise of the revolutionary bourgeoisie whose task it is to abolish

lordly privilege so as to permit the further development of the forces of production. Eventually the enormous development of the forces of production – notably industrialisation and mass production – would enter into contradiction with the limitations placed on the restricted consumption capacity of the proletarians. The latter in their turn become the new revolutionary class capable whose “historic task” is to overthrow the capitalist class and unleash the forces of production to meet a greatly expanded range of human needs.

To further add to the confusion, the building of what was falsely called ‘communism’ in Russia by the Soviet authorities popularized the idea that a long transition period – misleadingly called ‘socialism’ – was required in order to bring about the communist utopia. During the *transition period* working class consumption would be sidelined to allow the breakneck development of the forces of production, (tractor factories, dams, electrical power plants and the like). And there was of course doctrinal justification for such a position given that Marx was absolutely clear that in underdeveloped countries like early twentieth century Russia ‘communism’ was not in any way feasible. Although Marx never separated the ‘socialist’ stage from the ‘communist’ one, the early enthusiasm for the Soviet experiment led to the transitional stage idea sticking. Indeed, many left-leaning thinkers became obsessed with technological development as such, with Bordiga – as Bitot conveniently points out – in the uncomfortable position of trashing the need for further technical advance in capitalist Italy whilst recommending the rapid development of the forces of producing in Soviet Russia. This has created a good deal of confusion about what progress towards socialism really means.

Bitot’s objection to capitalist development seems in many ways to be an attempt to overcome the legacy of these confusions in the light of what he rightly considers to be a looming ecological crisis. But he adds a few more confusions of his own. To begin with he goes back to the very origins of communism as a political movement: the agrarian communism of Buonarroti and Babeuf and he contrasts this with what he sees as the consumerist interpretations of socialism popularized during the

twentieth century. As we know these pioneering communists were imprisoned and – in Babeuf’s case executed – in the years following the French revolution. Bitot sees in these interpretations an anticipation of the errors which socialists would make in the second half of the twentieth century.

Incorrectly believing that the emergence of agricultural capitalism could be largely explained by the immoderate expansion of needs and taste for luxury, the agrarian communists turned their backs on the unconstrained development of industry and championed a system based on fair but austere shares for all. In this communist utopia technological development in the shape of machinery would take place simply as a need to lighten manual labour, production being oriented toward the meeting of a fixed standard of living.

The development of English commerce depended, Bitot tells us, on the sharpening of acquisitive appetites and the introduction of machinery to meet an ever-expanding sphere of consumption: the upward spiral of capitalist production. This simplified depiction of capitalist development has the advantage of wrong-footing Marx who notoriously celebrated the technical achievements of the English industrial revolution in the *Communist Manifesto* and castigated the narrow material basis of the agrarian communists in France (he called them “crude communists”). Indeed, since Marx was prepared to admit that industrial capitalism provided the material preconditions for communism, he had in effect become a *de facto* fellow-traveller in the capitalist party, albeit a pretty unruly one. The solution, according to Bitot was to have nipped the capitalist weed in the bud by a bit of revolutionary action and Bitot appreciates the fact that French agrarian communism was an extension of the revolutionary *political* approach adopted earlier by Robespierre, the advocate of revolutionary terror. If only, one thinks, the English had read these thinkers rather than that scoundrel Adam Smith then they would have abandoned their silly economic ideas and got us to socialism a lot earlier.

Bitot’s French communists may have been poor but they were neither wage-labourers nor serfs. Subsistence with only limited participation in the monetary economy still remained a possibility

and the village could still operate as a community. In this sense, the emergence of capitalism could all too easily be identified with the inability of individuals to control their own desires once faced with the temptations of the marketplace. But however admirable their thinking was on any number of issues – and they *were* interesting thinkers – they were nonetheless not faced with the peculiar economic system which we now call capitalism. Furthermore, even if agrarian communist communities could have resisted the advent of a world market in agricultural products it is more than likely that an ever-more powerful capitalist class would have found a way to break them up as they have always done and continue to do today.

The problem with Bitot’s interpretation of the communist tradition is that it facilitates the treatment of technological development as a force which develops in a social vacuum justified by a largely ahistorical appreciation of the development of needs. In fact, the aim of the mature Marx was always to demonstrate that the ‘immutable laws’ of political economy were in fact nothing more than the expression of highly specific social and historical relations. The hothouse development of technology under capitalism, for example, was simply a vector of its unremitting search for new markets and its insatiable appetite for profits. As Bitot himself concedes, Marx shows how the needs of the wage labourer under capitalism contain a historical and relative element beyond the purely physiological necessities which also have to be satisfied: in other words my wages now allow me to obtain some commodities which used to be considered as luxuries but I can still be ‘poor’ in the (Marxist) sense that I still have to sell my labour-power to another. Dependence on the capitalist is neither based on being starved nor reduced by the possession of a few luxuries; it resides in the fact that my access to the means of subsistence has become indirect in that it is mediated by the possession of money.

Thus, although Bitot seems to have discovered a convenient jumping off point for the criticism of capitalism, his ideas provide few clues about how to find a way out. In the terms of this critique socialists who continue to believe in the possibility of open access to

the means of consumption under socialism can be too easily accused of wanting to continue the consumerist game and Bitot doesn't hesitate to tar the SPGB. with this brush. On the other hand, Bitot seems to accept that a fairly austere socialism is possible following the abolition of commodity production. But with the wants created by consumer society unconnected to the overall functioning of production, he is left with the difficulty of defining 'moderate needs' and showing how they would emerge within a society where commodity production no longer existed. After all, even if we can all agree that socialism will place more emphasis on meeting essential needs over the satisfaction of the trivial desires excited by capitalism, one still has the difficulty of defining these 'essential needs' no matter how austere one believes that socialism should be. But the problem of 'austere' or 'abundant' socialism is perhaps in the final analysis something of a quibble over words. As anyone who has argued the socialist case on a street corner will know, the 'abundance' referred to by socialists has never referred to the open-ended consumerism encouraged by the advertisers but has rather as its target a stable and more satisfying way of life in

which the scramble to get things is no longer central. With material survival removed from the casino of the marketplace by the abolition of commodity production we can expect that individuals will calm down their acquisitive desires and pursue more satisfying activities.

Fortunately even though he rehearses the usual arguments against socialism brought up by conservatives, Bitot seems reluctant to abandon the revolutionary idea altogether. He remains committed to the abolition of commodity production and has adopted the notion that production under socialism needs to be co-ordinated and de-centralized. (The SPGB can tell him how to do this without the price system). On the down side, he has now taken up the Third World population problem as a factor which he claims has been totally neglected by socialists. Regardless of the charge of inconsistency he then argues that further industrial development in these countries is necessary presumably on the grounds that the Third World exists on another planet. But capitalism is now more than ever a global system – witness the avalanche of books on the ills of globalization. The green beans in our plates come from Kenya, the knives and forks from

China and the shirts on our backs from India. Subsidized crops from the advanced countries are killing peasant production in Africa. But the Third World industrial proletariat now outstrips that of the so-called First World. Bitot's argument here is clearly self-defeating: If there is already a major population problem, then socialism as a world system is not only impossible but it is getting more impossible with every day which passes. So why write a book on the subject? Whilst there is clearly a need to deal with this problem lucidly, Bitot seems to have accepted the Malthusian legend at face value. But he gives only one statistic to prove the case about agricultural production in the Third World whilst First World production is subject to a statistical over-kill. Even Malthus, whose jeremiads have so far proved disastrously wrong, provided more substance to his arguments.

One is left with a curious diatribe against the word 'abundance' coupled to an off-centre accusation that socialists advocate a world of passive consumerism and idleness; a picture of the Third World as a boundless reservoir of illegal immigrants associated with the conviction that the abolition of commodity production is nonetheless possible.

MM



Cooking the Books 2

The fruits of labour

"We believe", John McCain declared in his acceptance speech at the Republican Party's convention in St. Pauls on 5 September, in "letting people keep the fruits of their labour".

Now, that's an idea. The only problem is that he seems to think that we are still living in 18th century colonial Americas when people worked for themselves at some trade and exchanged the product of their labour, whether farm produce, furniture, shoes, pots, candles or whatever, for the products of other people's own labour. This was exchange for use, what Marx called "simple commodity production", and where, as Benjamin Franklin who lived at the time noted, the products tended to exchange according to the time the independent producers had taken to make them. In this way they did get more or less the full equivalent of their labour.

But that was then. The artisan's tools have now developed into the powerful machines of today owned by capitalist companies while the producers now sell their ability to work to one or other of these companies in return for a wage or a salary. They no longer own and control the products of their labour. These belong to the company, which sells them for more than they cost to produce, pocketing the difference as their profits..

When producers first became separated from the means and instruments of production, as was increasingly the case throughout the 19th century, it was not difficult for them to realise what was happening. They could see that what they produced

sold for what it did when they had made them themselves as independent producers, but instead of them getting the full equivalent of their labour they only got a part of it as wages, the rest going to the capitalist who employed them. The source of the capitalists' profits was their unpaid labour.

So the demand for the full "fruits of our labour" went up among the more radical of the newly proletarianised producers. All sorts of schemes were devised by critics of capitalism such as Robert Owen in Britain, Proudhon in France and Lassalle in Germany to try to recreate the same result as in the old situation. But it was too late. They all failed as they had become irrelevant due to production no longer being individual but a collective effort.

In this new circumstance, if the demand for "the full fruits of labour" was to be met it could only be done collectively. The whole product of society would have to be commonly owned and used for the benefit of all. This of course is socialism and it is the only way that, today, people can get to keep the fruits of their (collective) labour.

McCain, however, is still thinking in individualistic terms. His rhetoric imagines that the wage worker is still an independent producer entitled to the full product of his or her individual labour. But he doesn't see this as not happening because of the profit extracted by the employer but because of the taxes levied by the government. In his eyes, it is the government not the capitalist that is the exploiter of people's labour. This is the cry not of the exploited producer but of the capitalist employer who does not want to share the profits of exploitation with the government.

But he needs to be careful. The rhetoric of the "fruits of labour" was originally an anti-capitalist, not a conservative, demand, and could – and should – become so again.

Crime and the causes of crime

Even the government accepts that crime will rise as economic conditions worsen, but is this the only reason for rising crime?

It's a wonder any of us gets any sleep. It must be terrifying in the world today. Whenever *Private Eye* puts a spoof *Daily Mail* headline in its pages, such as "Criminal Yobbo Thugs give you Falling House Price CANCER!" no one laughs. It isn't funny because it's too similar to real *Daily Mail* headlines written for the terminally terrified. Where they are believed, it seems, the world is crawling with criminals with no more desire than to rip people's hearts out and tear their corpse into indigestible shreds. After all, it is the fear of crime that politicians have sought for so many years to tackle, not the creature itself.

According to the statistics, crime in the UK has been rising steadily since the mid-1950's, although it certainly accelerated in the early 1980's. It should be borne in mind, though, that the rate of reporting crimes has risen in that time, as has the number of crimes it is possible to commit, thanks to the governments (particularly the current one) creating endless new offences year in year out. Real crime, though, has certainly risen. The number of indictable offences per thousand population in 1900 was 2.4 and in 1997 the figure was 89.1. In 1965 6.8 per million people were murdered. By 1997 this had risen to 14.1 per million. Over the last century, the number of police in the UK has risen by over 120,000 to stand at around 150,000.

Yet crime continues to grow, despite all the police. The former Mayor of London, before he was kicked out, Ken Livingstone, made great play over how his increase in the number of the police in the capital, from 25,000 to 31,000 police officers, had reduced crime. He was right that the Tories, for all their talk on being tough on crime, had held back spending on policing levels. In fact, that's no surprise: policing accounts for around 52 percent of the criminal justice budget, and the Tories are first and foremost cheapskates. Plus, how can you be tough on crime if there isn't any? For them it is a virtuous political circle: let crime run free, then be tough on it, on the cheap, and then ask for plaudits for being tough on yobbos. That is by the by, though. Despite Ken's protestations, it wasn't his police force that cut crime. It was economic conditions.

The "tough on crime" brigade are easy to refute. Some commentators blame the 60's permissive society and its aftermath of sexual liberation for rising crime. They point to the end of the death penalty and penal reform measures. Yet, the number of prisoners in British cells were growing from the mid-forties onwards, before crime rates

themselves began to rise. Now they stand at around 94,000 – and all the prisons are full. They've even had to start releasing prisoners early – in the back half of 2007 18,583 prisoners were given early release to relieve overcrowding. A staggering number, that has been replaced. All early release means is more people going through the prison system and being disciplined by it. After all, a great number of released prisoners re-offend and are convicted within two years.

This is all part of the trend. In 1941 there were only around 10,000 prisoners. Even as late as 1991 there were only about 40,000. If prison "worked" surely crime would have been around halved by doubling the prison population? Or at least, more drastically cut than by the modest falls we've seen over recent years. Now, the government wants to build extra capacity, three so called Titan Prisons each with a capacity of 7,500, which means they only see the rate of incarceration going up and up.

They have reason to believe that. A leaked draft letter this month told us that Home Office officials were warning ministers that the economic slow down would almost certainly lead to a rise in crime. The letter predicted property crime would rise by 7 percent in 2008 and a further 2 percent in 2009, if the current economic conditions continued. Home Office minister Tony McNulty said the letter was a "statement of the blindingly obvious", which considering, to their credit, Labour actually formally linked crime rates to economic conditions in their analysis when they first came to power, isn't a surprising view.

The BBC's Economics Editor Mark Easton takes issue with whether it is so blindingly obvious that economic downturns promote the increase in crime. As part of this he proposes a different source of crime, citing a report that shows that for every rise of 1 percent in inflation, property crime rises by 0.026 percent; but that is just another name for poverty – when inflation lowers people's

ANNUAL PERCENTAGE CHANGE IN PROPERTY CRIME (THEFT AND BURGLARY) AND IN CONSUMERS' EXPENDITURE



incomes those who can't easily compensate (for instance through pay rises) will be hard hit.

He is right, though, to note that while the rise in crime generally does not map directly onto the graph of economic up and downs, it does bear a resemblance to the growth in relative poverty. According to the report *Poverty, wealth and place in Britain, 1968-2005* from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation so-called bread line poor, i.e. those who are excluded from normal participation in society due to their lack of wealth, grew to around 27 percent of households in 2005, up from 17 percent in 1980. More strikingly, the non-wealthy/non-poor fell by a dramatic 16 percent in the same period. The proportion of society in the very rich category also fell.

This ties in with a graph Easton produces:

The two scales are inverted, the left scale (consumer spending) ascends while the right scale (theft and burglary rates) descends. The match is pretty precise. Whilst it may not be enough to say that one causes another, it is enough to suggest that they are heavily linked. Poverty doesn't make criminals, it just gives people more chances and incentives to be criminals. Put another way, the decline in social bonds caused by consumerism and rising inequality fuels a dog-eat-dog world which can turn nasty.

Of the 302,000 people sentenced for indictable offences in 2006, 160,100 of them were for property related crimes (theft, criminal damage, etc.). That is, over half of crimes. In 2006/7 some 75 percent of reported crimes were crimes relating to property. Poverty does not just push the creation of crime. It's well known that the poor are much more likely to be the victims of crime, with the bottom 40 percent of society being way ahead of the top on every measure of crime victimhood. Lone parent and unemployed households are twice as likely to be burgled than the average household; and burglary rates are greater in densely populated and often poor London than in the rest of the south east.

Women in the sex industry are particularly prone to being victims of crime. A report by the Poppy Project, called *The Big Brothel* found staggering quantities of women working in the sex trade and being treated as little

more than shoddy goods by their exploiters. They state that during '120 hours of telephone calls, we established the following: at least 1,933 women are currently at work in London's brothels; ages range from 18 to 55 (with a number of premises offering "very, very young girls"); prices for full sex start at £15, and go up to £250' The pimps offered two for one deals, discount vouchers, happy hours – the whole marketing gamut as they made between £86 million to £205 million per year with a brothel. This isn't a normal business transaction though – the women are often beaten and raped. Turned into a commodity themselves, all social bonds utterly severed between them and their clients. In it's own way, another form of property crime.

There is other evidence for alienation being the motor of crime. A recent report on the BBC revealed that 1 in 11 prisoners in a British gaol is a former member of the armed services, that is, approximately 8,500. The probation officers association NAPO recounts stories of strung out soldiers turning violent after returning from war. That is, those whose social bonds have been deliberately shorn in order to make them into fit killing machines, or whose bonds have been shattered by the experience of killing and conflict, are highly likely to fall into crime, and find themselves on the prison scrap heap.

The Home Office report also deals with the rise of political extremism, another form of expressing alienation. It warns of attacks on immigrants and the growth of racist parties, should Britain slide into recession. Of course, the terrorism obsessed government also considers how this rise in the far-right might lead to more terrorism in retaliation. This should serve as a warning to those who figure that simple economic catastrophism will lead mechanically to socialist revolution. The growth of socialism can only come from the working class consciously deciding that changing the economic system will save them from the woes of crime and violence extremism bred by the current on, and acting on that decision.

PIK SMEET

Growing old disgracefully

In primitive society one of the greatest sources of human survival was the knowledge of the elderly. If you lived in a gathering/ hunting society the knowledge of where plants occurred, where animals existed and at what times of the year was essential for human society. Knowledge was power. So much was this the case for human survival that one of the first forms of religion was Ancestor Worship.

We no longer live in a gathering/ hunting society, we live in a modern capitalist society. This is a society where the majority work for a wage or a salary and a tiny minority live off the surplus value that they produce. Inside this society attitudes towards the elderly are completely different. If they are poor they are looked upon as a burden by the capitalist class and some sort of creature, that had they any decency would just disappear.

Away back in 1908 when state pensions were first paid in the UK there was the view that this piece of reform would end old-age poverty. People like David Lloyd George and Charles Booth hailed the legislation as a major breakthrough on the abolition of old-age poverty.

"Yet 100 years on, 2.5 million pensioners – more than a fifth of all those aged over 65 – still struggle to pay their bills and keep their home warm" (*Times*, 31 July). Such is the nature of capitalism and the lick-spittles that operate it that they have come up with a great new idea that will save the owning class millions.

"People will be forced to work until they are aged 70 if the basic state pension is to survive into the next century, according to the Government's pension supremo. Lord Turner of Ecchinswell, the architect of radical reform in which the retirement age will rise to 68 by 2046, said that with no limit in sight for life expectancy, people are going to have to work even longer than he proposed" (*Times*, 31 July).

When I was very young an elderly man taught me about capitalism. One of the lessons he taught me was – the owning class need young men and women to provide for them, but we don't need them. As in primitive society we must heed the elderly – knowledge is power.

RD



new houses, owing to their destitution. What they lack is not the need for a good place to live but effective demand: they can't pay so are of no interest to housebuilders. What capitalism fulfils, then, is not human need, but need that can be paid for. There is no point from a business perspective in producing goods if people, whatever their needs, cannot pay for them.

Effective demand further affects the quality of what is produced. It's no good producing only the best whatever if they are unaffordable. The size of workers' wages means there is a demand for cheap goods, though it can hardly be said that

The motive for production under capitalism is making a profit. In order for goods to be manufactured or services to be provided, they must result in a reasonable amount of profit, otherwise they won't be produced. Even 'loss leaders' serve the goal of profit, by enticing customers into a shop.

In contrast, socialism will be based on production for use.

The whole issue of profit will be meaningless in a socialist society, with no money or buying and selling. Items will be made because they are useful, because they satisfy people's needs for food, housing, transport, clothes, leisure interests, or whatever.

Now, some supporters of capitalism will argue that production for profit implies production for use. No company, for instance, will make a profit by producing goods that nobody will want to use. There is therefore, so the argument goes, a requirement for capitalist concerns to produce useful things. Many objects that were once found in people's homes (mangles, for instance) are not produced nowadays, because technological progress has meant they are no longer wanted.

There is a tiny bit of truth in this, in that people won't on the whole buy what they don't want or need. But there is far more to be said on this matter, and looking at it more closely reveals what's wrong with production for profit, and indeed with capitalism more generally.

For a start, the other side of the coin of production for profit is 'no profit, no production'. This applies not just to outdated fashions and technology, but to any good or service, no matter how badly it is needed. Take housing, for instance. In the current credit crunch, the number of new houses being built has been drastically reduced, even though there is clearly a need for more houses, given the increasing population and the amount of people homeless or living in sub-standard accommodation. But building houses is now not so profitable as it was a year or so ago, hence the cut in housebuilders' profits and decline in new housing starts. Hence too the many blocks of flats that are half-built but will not be finished because there is no prospect of selling them at a profit.

And of course it's not just housing. Whenever you hear of post offices being shut or rural bus services being axed, it's because they don't pay, not because nobody wants or needs them. About four pubs a day close; not enough people are spending money in them, but it's not that they fail to meet some need or are of no use.

We referred above to the homeless or people in bad housing. These are likely to be the very poorest, who are unable to afford a mortgage or the rent for a decent home. But under capitalism they are not part of the possible market for

there is a need for shoddy and dangerous commodities. The current economic downturn has led to more people shopping in cheaper supermarkets, but hardly out of choice. Again, production for profit is in no way identical — or even similar — to production for use.

The same logic underlies the paradox of millions starving in a world where enough food can be produced to feed everyone. The starving in Africa and Asia barely form a market and cannot be sold to at a profit. This simple point by itself should be enough to condemn the domination of the profit motive.

And is it really the case that people only buy what they want? This view ignores the impact of advertising, which can lead people to purchase stuff to keep up with the Joneses or make their children happy or enable their teenagers to respond to peer pressure. Capitalism has to advertise its wares, both to encourage customers to buy new products and to keep them buying existing ones. In so doing, it necessarily promotes new 'needs' that are really no such thing.

Moreover, the imperative for companies to make a profit implies that they seek to lower costs, including the cost of labour power, the mental and physical energies of

their workers. That's what wages are: the price of our ability to work. Profits are realised when commodities are sold, but they arise in the course of production. Workers produce more in the value of what they output than in what they are paid. Profits, or surplus value, come from this difference.

By driving down wages, or making workers labour for longer hours on the same pay, employers can increase their profits. The drive for profit also leads them to reduce spending on health and safety, as this cuts into profits. Whenever you hear about unsafe working practices, it's a good bet that it's due not to individual carelessness but to the need for profit.

It's worth noting that, when we say socialism will be based on production for use, this does not mean that everybody will live in the lap of luxury. It does mean that there will be no squalid housing or a choice between eating and heating or children who go to bed hungry. The key criterion in production will be not 'is it profitable?' but 'is it needed?'. And the process of production will be safe as it can be, and the goods produced will also be safe rather than harmful. Due care will be taken of the impact on the environment too. Production for profit will have been confined to a barely-understandable and barbaric past.

PAUL BENNETT

“The key criterion in socialism will be not ‘is it profitable?’ but ‘is it needed?’”

Socialist Party Merchandise

Teeshirts:

Blue with polar bear and 'If you were a polar bear, you'd be a socialist' plus party website address.

Yellow, with blue and green globe 'The world is a treasury for all' plus party web site address on. Sizes: Small, Medium, Large, Extra Large.

Mugs:

One style: 'Duet' - Red and white with 'Only sheep need leaders' (pictured) and website on, with "Famine? War? Pollution? Capitalism is the Problem. World Socialism is the Solution" and party tel. number on.



Pens:

Blue and white, with blue ink 'Only sheep need leaders' and a sheep plus party website
 Red and white, with blue ink 'Workers of the world unite' plus party website
 Black with black ink. 'Only sheep need leaders!' and a sheep plus party website

Baseball caps:

navy blue, with embroidered "World Socialist Movement" on.

Balloons:

different colours, with "World Socialist Movement" on.

Prices:

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Anti-war Morris

***Crossing the 'river of fire' : the socialism of William Morris.* By Hassan Mahamdallie. Redwords. 2008. £7.99**

This is an SWP take on William Morris. Reasonably accurate, it emphasises (as might be expected from the SWP, at least in its current period) Morris's anti-war and anti-imperialism stance. And Morris's statement in the January 1887 issue of *Commonweal* does bear repeating:

"Meantime if war really becomes imminent our duties as socialists are clear enough, and do not differ from those we have to act on ordinarily. To further the spread of international feeling between workers by all means possible; to point out to our own workmen that foreign competition and rivalry, or commercial war, culminating at last in open war, are necessities of the plundering classes, and that the race and commercial quarrels of these classes only concern us so far as we can use them as opportunities for fostering discontent and revolution; that the interests of the workmen are the same in all countries and they can never really be the enemies of each other; that the men of our labouring classes, therefore, should turn a deaf ear to the recruiting sergeant, and refuse to allow themselves be dressed up in red and be taught to form a part of the modern killing machine for the honour and glory of a country in which they have only a dog's share of many kicks and a few halfpence, - all this we have to preach always, though in the event of imminent war we may have to preach it more emphatically."

For most of his active period as a socialist Morris was an "impossibilist" in that he favoured a policy of "making socialists" and "education for socialism" rather than seeking working class support on the basis of reform demands. Committed as they are to reformist agitation, the SWP find this an embarrassment just as much as E.P. Thompson did in both his CP and post-CP days. Mahamdallie argues that the correct tactic for Morris and the Socialist League would have been to do what the SWP does today: to get involved in the non-socialist, day-to-day struggles of workers with a view to directing them. He also claims that in 1890 Morris realised the "dreadful mistake" he had made in not doing this.

But did Morris admit this? His November 1890 resignation statement from the Socialist League (which had been taken over by bomb-throwing

anarchists) "Where Are We Now? "does not say this. It says rather that he still thought he was right, but that as the working class seemed to have chosen a different path, so be it; that was their choice.

To be frank, Engels thought that Morris was wrong and preferred the reformist ILP to both the Socialist League and the SDF as a step towards the formation of genuine mass socialist party. But who was right? Morris or Engels? The ILP led to the Labour Party, which has been and gone, and we are still no nearer to socialism. The urgent need is still, as Morris insisted, campaigning for socialism not reforms.

ALB

Chavism

***Build It Now: Socialism for the 21st century.* By Michael Lebowitz. Monthly Review**

One criticism often levelled at books written by advocates of socialism is that they are over-theoretical, emphasizing in minute detail elements of capitalism that first have to be understood in order to grasp the essentials of the alternative but that they don't get to the nitty-gritty of the practical elements required in order to reach the goal. This leaves readers suspended, in agreement about all the negatives of capitalism, but wondering how on earth this behemoth can be overturned, how anti-capitalism can be turned into socialism.

Lebowitz approaches the topic from a different angle, explaining the ethos of socialism at every opportunity and points out, reflecting Marx's words, that socialism is actually not the goal but simply the means to an end - the end being the full development of human potential. He refers frequently to the three elements crucial to this overall human development - economic, political and social transformation - arguing that this has to be a work in progress; that there cannot be only one route when taking into account the diverse economic, political and cultural situations around the world.

Some of the chapters were originally speeches he gave to workers' organisations in Venezuela where, in 2004, he was an adviser in the Ministry for the Social Economy. There is a discussion of lessons learned from Yugoslavia's experiences in self-management in the mid-1900s; some analysis of neoclassical and neoliberal economics (he is professor emeritus of economics at Simon Fraser University

in Vancouver); his judgement of why social democracy failed to deliver on its early promises (he was provincial policy chair of Canada's social democratic Party, the NDP, 1972-5); plus his views on socialism as a process.

As socialists we recognize that as socialism requires a majority mandate the first task is human development, the "education" of the masses to the logic of socialism. It is also the case that, as there is no blueprint for socialism as such, we can imagine that the detailed structures of socialism in the different parts of the world (which won't have to be exactly the same) will become clearer the nearer we approach it. But Lebowitz envisages a transition when there will still be a government which would still have much work to do convincing hard and fast capitalist supporters, changing attitudes that will persist (patriarchy, racism, discrimination), and removing barriers (in health, education, living standards) which currently prevent the reaching of an equitable society.

His criticism of social democracy is that, when in government, it has been unwilling to mobilize people on behalf of such policies: "the central flaw in social democracy proposals for endogenous development is that they break neither ideologically nor politically with dependence upon capital" because to do so would necessitate "incorporating the mass of population that has so far been excluded from their share of the achievements of modern civilisation" and at the same time would unleash a host of enemies in the form of the international monetary institutions, imperial power and their forces of subversion plus those who monopolize the wealth and the land. Social democracy's greatest failing, he says, was its core belief that the only practicable policy was that tinkering with details, reforming piecemeal in the hope of putting a more humane face on capitalism, its failure to offer an alternative logic based on human beings to the logic of capital.

The logic of capital versus the need for human development is a thread that winds through each of the chapters which culminate with his observations on how the "Bolivarian revolution" (which he sees as the beginning of a possible transition to socialism) is developing, warts and all. His conclusion is that "there is nothing inevitable about whether the Bolivarian Revolution will succeed in building that new society or whether it will lapse into a new variety of capitalism with populist characteristics. Only struggle will determine this."

"A new variety of capitalism with

populist characteristics" would seem to be an apt description of Venezuela under Chavez, even if Lebowitz presents the best case that can be for the opposite view.

JS

Hungry for Socialism?

Hunger. By Raymond Tallis. Acumen, 2008.

Raymond Tallis, a physician turned philosopher, has delivered a thoughtful if slightly anarchic book in The Art Of Living series. In 164 pages he discusses several different concepts and manifestations of hunger. Starting with the nature and evolution of biological hunger in animals and humans, he goes on to trace how the pleasure of meeting nutritional needs has spawned for humans a multitude of other pleasures.

The author looks at how the hunger for food develops into what he calls hunger for others. There comes, for at least some people, the hunger for meaning and significance. Tallis's final chapter "asks how we might manage our individual and collective hungers better so that we shall be less possessed by them and more concerned with the suffering of those to whom even subsistence is denied".

The author makes several references to Marx, mainly on the fetishism of commodities and humans producing their own means of subsistence, but he nowhere expresses a hunger for revolutionary change. He does, however, take issue with another philosopher, John Gray, for whom planet earth has been doomed by the arrogance of human beings ("Homo sapiens"). Tallis points out that when humans regard their species as no more than animals they are inclined to treat one another even worse than hitherto.

As the author notes, the world we live in demands that we consume many things beyond our bodily needs. It is "a world where many have little or nothing to eat while many more are eating far too much and are in hot pursuit of a multitude of secondary and elective hungers". Tallis doesn't talk about a socialist future but he does say a few words about utopia: "The central presupposition of utopian [is] that our hungers will somehow serve our fellow men and not set one against another, that there are fundamental desires that will drive us to work for the common good."

We drink to that!

SRP

Manchester

Tour of Marx' and Engels' Manchester
Saturday **11 October**

Meet by the ticket office at Victoria Station at 2pm

Autumn Delegate Meeting

Saturday **18 October** 10.30 to 5.30
Sunday **19 October** 11.00 to 5.00.
Socialist Party Head Office, 52 Clapham High St, London SW4 (nearest tube: Clapham North).

London

FILM NIGHTS

Sunday **26 October**, 4pm:

Judgement Day: Intelligent Design on Trial.

Sunday **26 October**, 4pm:

The Corporation

52 Clapham High Street.

(Nearest tube: Clapham North)

Manchester

Monday **27 October**, 8.30pm

Discussion on The Priorities of Socialist Society

Unicorn, Church Street, City centre

For details of meeting to launch the new Socialist Party pamphlet on the environment on Saturday 25 October see page 5.

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Green capitalism?

Thanks very much for your email of July 15 (with the article “Capitalism versus Nature”, July *Socialist Standard*). Excellent article!

And I certainly agree with the broad thrust of your analysis, though I guess I would distinguish between capitalism as some monolithic entity incapable of any change, and the kind of capitalism which might (just!) be able to avoid coming into conflict with nature. Touch and go, I have

to admit, but I guess that’s what I’m still working away at trying to test out.

JONATHON PORRITT

Reply: Reforming capitalism to serve the common interest has been tried before and has never worked. Our view is that it never will.— *Editors.*

Olympic Retrospect

I started watching the Olympics and at first was just taken by how

well the participants excelled in their particular activities. Then an unease about the whole show leaked through. The elitism, the flag waving and the full-on nationalism made me switch off. Better the athletes, etc had competed in the name of their multinational sponsors or pharmaceutical company than this hideous exhibition of national identity. Backed up by officials and commentators winding up the patriotic fervour, even that stupid chump Adrian Chiles and other media prostitutes, screaming for “their” country. Doubtless the same was happening in all the other countries’ media. I expect the 1936 Olympics was much like this.

STUART GIBSON, Bournemouth

Not Standard terminology?

I have long been impressed by the range and quality of writing in the *Socialist Standard*, but in “The Irish No” (September) Declan Ganley is described as a ‘self-made millionaire’ and reference is made to ‘former Communist countries’. Unqualified use of such terms, repeated ad nauseam in the capitalist media, is surely something to be avoided in a socialist journal..

ROBERT STAFFORD, Norway

Reply: You’re right of course. No millionaire is “self-made” as they get rich by exploiting workers. And the so-called “Communist” countries were not communist but state-capitalist. Apologies for the missing inverted commas.— *Editors*

Behind the Race Riots



RECENT DISTURBANCES in Nottingham and London have brought up the question of the attitude between people of different colour; as if there must always be a fundamental difference in outlook and conduct between people with differently coloured skins.

Although on the surface the feeling associated with the recent disturbances is anti-white and anti-colour, and the rougher elements on both sides have taken the opportunity to turn this feeling into an occasion for rioting, the origin of the feeling has a deeper cause than just anti-colour.

The origin of the conflicting attitudes is fundamentally economic. Out of economic relationships arise emotions that take many forms which do not appear to have any connection with the relationships and are transformed into a variety of beliefs; for example, the false belief in the mental and moral superiority of people with white skins.

The conditions of capitalism produce a mental, or intellectual, atmosphere in which many conflicting attitudes flourish and older attitudes are

modified. For instance, a pro-war and anti-war, a pro-religious and anti-religious, a pro-nationalist and anti-nationalist, and so on.

When the West Indians and Nigerians first came here in force there was no particular antipathy to them; there was only some amusement and admiration of their liveliness and colourful clothing, as well as the customary patronising attitude that is generally displayed towards any “foreigner,” whatever his skin colour. Labour was scarce then and unemployment was practically non-existent. However, when unemployment began to grow and the housing question remained acute, sufferers, and prospective sufferers, looked around for something to blame their troubles on and newcomers, as always, appeared to them to be an obvious part cause of their sufferings. In these circumstances the general attitude towards coloured people began to change and they became scapegoats for a failure of capitalism to meet society’s needs.

(from front page article by Gilmac, *Socialist Standard*, October 1958)

Declaration of Principles

This declaration is the basis of our organisation and, because it is also an important historical document dating from the formation of the party in 1904, its original language has been retained.

Object

The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.

Declaration of Principles

The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e., land, factories, railways, etc.)

by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.

2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.

3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.

4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom,

the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind, without distinction of race or sex.

5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.

6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organize consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.

7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.

8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.



When You're Smiling...

It is likely that a lot of people would be noticeably happier if Gordon Brown would stop smiling. Those startling, carefully orchestrated facial arrangements – inflicted on soldiers in Afghanistan looking after the oil supply lines, on Olympic athletes calculating how much their status as gold medalists will be worth when they get back home, on bewildered parents taking their offspring for a quite sea-front stroll in Southwold – are not a pretty sight and convince nobody that the Prime Minister is relaxed and happy with his ability to grapple British capitalism out of its present crisis. Less disturbing would be the funereal countenance recently so characteristic of him..

To take the question further – what is there for Gordon Brown to smile about? Among the “experts” who expect to be trusted to correctly prescribe remedies for the ills of capitalism, there is general agreement that the situation can only get worse and that we are about to be overwhelmed by a slump. A couple of months ago no less a person than the governor of the Bank of England warned us that “The nice years of the 60s are over” – an assessment which would have impressed only those whose memories of those years – the boom and slump economy, the Cuba missile crisis, the war in Vietnam – are anything but “nice”. More recently Alistair Darling, Brown’s choice to succeed him as Chancellor of the Exchequer rocked the governmental boat when he declared, in an interview with the *Guardian*, that “The economic times we are facing are arguably the worst they’ve been in 60 years and I think it’s going to be more profound and long-lasting than people thought” and later, bemoaning Labour’s fall out of electoral favour “People are pissed off with us”.

Resilient

Chancellors of the Exchequer are not supposed to be so frank about what goes on in the economy, so that Darling’s comments were open to being dismissed as a “gaffe” – which was in fact an admission that his comments were nearer the truth than Brown’s persistent assertion that the government has so effectively strengthened the British economy that it will weather the storm – unless the voters are so ungrateful that they put in a Tory government to undo all his good work. His government, Brown said, is “resilient” in the way it is dealing with the present problems (expect to hear more of “resilient” – it has all the hallmarks of a word essential to any Labour Party weasel with ambitions to slither up the greasy pole).

The best that Labour MPs can offer in this appalling situation is to grumble that it is all Brown’s fault; get rid of him, by whatever means, and things will get better. The most recent of these was, notably, the discarded, embittered ex-Home Secretary Charles Clarke. The intellectual contortions required in this come easily to the practised amnesiacs on the Labour benches but we should remem-



ber that it is not very long ago that these same representatives of the people were clamorous in their praise of Brown as the greatest Chancellor of the Exchequer in history. This was the leader whose superhuman powers had constructed an economy virtually free of unemployment, with an uninflatable price structure and interest rates so low that thousands were tempted to leap into the void of unaffordable mortgages. Now that those happy delusions have been blown away by cruel reality Labour is turning to the equally bankrupt notion that their party’s salvation lies in ridding itself of Brown. Adjustments like that are effective conditioning to the dishonesty inherent in trying to run British capitalism. The problem is that no leader can be any more successful, can cook the books, deny reality and deceive the voting people, any more effectively.

Miliband

This will not prevent them persisting in their endless search for the unobtainable. And while they do this, each one will harbour, somewhere in their feverish self-assessment, the ambition that they are the ideal leader the party has been waiting for – the one with the insight and the power to succeed where historically everyone else



has failed. For their own peace of mind, it must be hoped that these delusions will not endure beyond one or two sleepless nights. David Miliband, possibly enjoying in his abrupt promotion to the heady, if cynically seamy, job of Foreign Secretary, recently let it be known that he is ready to accept the crown. In an article in the *Guardian* he began in the pose

as a fearless confronter of reality – although perhaps unsettling more stubbornly myopic Labour supporters – with the admission that “The odds are against us, no question” but then mollified those he had disturbed with a generous measure of re-assuring platitudes: “Every member of the Labour party carries with them the simple guiding mission on the membership card: to put power, wealth and opportunity in the hands of the many, and not the few” and later he expanded on this platitude with some more “...the challenge to society – to build a genuine sense of belonging and responsibility on the back of greater protection from outside risks and greater control of local issues”. Perhaps, in spite of this, Miliband will succeed to the leadership. But it will not take long for the surge of capitalist society to expose him as just another discredited politician.

This doleful procession of ecstatic expectations followed by rumbling doubts then exposure and rejection, seems to feed on a self-perpetuating energy originating in an apparently limitless capacity for working-class self-deception. There have been many victims of this, of eminent leaders fallen into the dustbin of history. Gordon Brown looks like being only the latest in this dismal line. How long can he keep smiling?

IVAN



Voice from the Back

A SOCIETY OF CONTRASTS

Everywhere you look today the contradictions of capitalism become more and more obvious. Great wealth alongside great poverty, starvation amidst plenty and a technology that makes space travel possible yet is unable to stop the destruction of war. Two recent examples of the obscenity of capitalism leapt from the pages of the media recently. "Caviar House & Prunier, on Piccadilly, has taken delivery of the Almas, a rare golden caviar once reserved for the Tsars of Russia. Despite the price - £920 for limited edition 50g tins - the shop claims a four-year waiting list."



(Times, 19 August) "The price of rat meat has quadrupled in Cambodia this year as inflation has put other meat beyond the reach of poor people, officials said on Wednesday. With consumer price inflation at 37 percent according to the latest central bank estimate, demand has pushed a kilogram of rat meat up to around 5,000 riel (69 pence) from 1,200 riel last year." (Yahoo News, 27 August) Does this system not disgust you? We must abolish it.

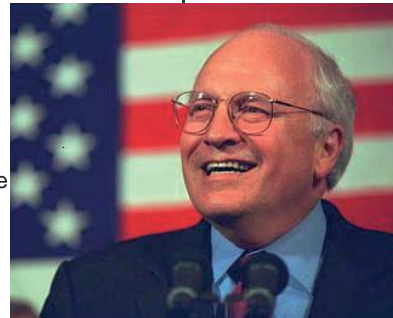
MARX AND MODERNITY

Away back in 1867 Karl Marx in *Das Capital* explained how the so-called primitive accumulation of capital was based on robbery and murder. In Peru today a similar process is taking place. In Britain we had the highland clearances and the enclosure acts, in Peru it is the expulsion of the indigenous population. "Peru is considering sending in the army to break up protests by Amazonian Indians who claim the government is preparing a massive land grab in the country's remote jungles. ... The government has responded to an appeal for talks by declaring a state of emergency in three states and threatening protesters with military action. "Indigenous people are defending themselves against government aggression," said an Amazon Indian rights campaigner, Alberto Pizango. "This is not an ordinary or everyday demonstration. The Indians have told us they are not

afraid. If the government declares a state of emergency they prefer to die there and show that this government violates human rights." Relations between indigenous groups and the President Alan Garcia have become increasingly hostile as the government has sought to exploit what are thought to be rich oil and gas deposits in lands owned by Amazon Indians. Energy companies have pushed deep into supposedly protected areas in the past year, leading to clashes with some of the most remote tribal peoples left in the world." (Independent, 21 August)

US GAP WIDENS

Socialists often meet with the argument that while capitalism may have been a terrible system in the past, with the awful gap between rich and poor, today we are gradually improving things and such inequalities no longer exists. So what do the anti-socialists make of these recent statistics? "The rich-poor gap also widened with the nation's top one percent now collecting 23 percent of total income, the biggest disparity since 1928, according to the Economic Policy Institute. One side statistic supplied by the IRS: there are now 47,000 Americans worth \$20 million or more, an all-time high." (San Francisco Chronicle, 2 September) Eighty years of reform and now the gap is even wider.



BEHIND THE RHETORIC

Capitalist statesmen often speak of high ideals like freedom and democracy but behind the high-sounding rhetoric there is usually a harsh reality. A recent example was the US vice-president's speech in Georgia. "Speaking in Georgia on Thursday, Cheney slammed Russia's "illegitimate, unilateral attempt" to redraw the country's

borders and promised ongoing support for Georgia's efforts to join NATO. The Vice President's trip was accompanied by a \$1 billion aid package announced in Washington Wednesday, for the purpose of rebuilding Georgia's shattered economy and infrastructure. Upon arriving in Azerbaijan on Wednesday, Cheney told the people of that country and their neighbors in Georgia and Ukraine that "the United States has a deep and abiding interest in your well-being and security." Fine words indeed, but behind them was a more sordid reason than concern for the well-being of the Georgian citizens. "Vice President Dick Cheney, on a tour of former Soviet Republics, was working to shore up U.S. alliances in the wake of Russia's military humiliation of Georgia - a mission whose outcome could have profound consequences for Washington's efforts to maintain and expand the flow of oil and natural gas to the West while bypassing Russia." (Time, 4 September)

THE INDIAN RUPEE TRICK

Many Asian countries are depicted as "third-world" where an undeveloped economy leaves millions starving, but here is an example of an Indian capitalist who has learned the trick

of exploiting workers to make a fortune." Vijay Mallya, the founder and chairman of fast-growing Kingfisher Airlines, launched his first international route yesterday linking Heathrow with India's IT capital Bangalore - a daily service that puts the carrier in head-to-head competition with BA. ...The father-of-three, ranked 476th in Fortune's list of the world's wealthiest people, has 26 homes around the world and 260 vintage cars. He made his fortune as chairman of Indian drinks group United Breweries, the Kingfisher-beer owner that last year acquired Scotch whisky maker Whyte & Mackay for £595m." (Daily Telegraph, 5 September)

Free Lunch

by Rigg

